

SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER (CA)
8 OCTOBER 1982

One man's lonely fight turns into a crusade against government

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It started for Angus Mackenzie with a bunch of local cops crashing through his front door, but it has turned into a holy crusade against the government and its most powerful agencies, the CIA, FBI and Army.

In his more whimsical moments, the bearded, bespectacled Mackenzie can almost see some humor in his David and Goliath fight with the government. "I have this dream of waking up one morning and seeing a headline, 'Hippie Beats CIA,'" Angus says.

But then the glint comes back into his eyes and the 31-year-old freelance writer talks again of what he calls a secret war to subvert the First Amendment to the Constitution and to destroy the alternative press in the United States.

That 15-year-old war already has been far more successful than most Americans even suspect, Mackenzie claims, and he insists it is still going on.

"Nobody who has investigated this, the (U.S. Senate) Church Committee, the few journalists who have looked into it or anyone else, says that it has stopped," he says.

"The fact that the government is destroying newspapers in this country is really serious business and everybody is turning their head. The underground press is turning its head, the straight press is turning its head. Nobody is raising hell and saying this has got to stop."

Nobody, that is, except for Angus Mackenzie and maybe one or two others.

Mackenzie, who was born in New York City and has lived in San Francisco since he was "kicked out of Wisconsin" several years ago, at the moment is the principal in a major test case which could help determine how effective the nation's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) really is and how far the government can go in avoiding its provisions.

The FOIA, passed in 1966, strengthened in 1974 and now the target of increasing attempts to weaken it, gives people the right to request, and receive, copies of government documents, including those about investigations involving the individual.

Since it was passed, it has frequently been used by journalists and others to expose cases of government wrongdoing.

But Mackenzie says the law is being stretched to the limit by the CIA and other agencies to cover up government abus-



Examiner/Sid Tate

ACTIVIST ANGUS MACKENZIE
Defends Freedom of Information Act

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Specifically, the CIA is refusing to release documents Mackenzie claims would show a systematic campaign to discredit and destroy underground newspapers.

A suit is pending in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., to force the CIA to release documents on dozens of underground newspapers to Mackenzie. Last month, the CIA agreed to release some of the information he has requested but he says that doesn't go far enough.

Mackenzie's first battle started in June, 1970, when Beloit, Wis., police kicked down the door of the house in which he and his brother, James, were living and putting out an antiwar monthly called People's Dreadnaught.

The cops said they were looking for an AWOL Army private (who was never found) and thoroughly searched the house, he said. The raid and continued police harassment, including detectives hanging around outside, led to lost revenue and the eventual folding of the underground paper, Mackenzie says.

He eventually won a federal suit which held that his constitutional rights had been abused. More importantly, that incident first raised his suspicions that the government was engaged in a secret war against the alternative press.

Starting in 1967 with Ramparts Magazine, the war may have affected 150 of the 500 underground publications that served as the wallposters of the anti-war and counter-culture movements in the late '60s and early '70s.

Using government documents he has been able to obtain, Mackenzie says much of the anti-underground paper campaign was carried on under the CIA's Operation CHAOS.

CHAOS, set up to look into foreign connections of domestic dissidents, grew out of the CIA's investigation of Ramparts, the San Francisco-based fountainhead of the rhetoric of the Left in the late '60s. Ramparts at the time was about to expose the CIA's use of the National Student Association, the then-American Newspaper Guild and some foundations as conduits for CIA funding of secret programs.

From there, it and other programs grew into a general campaign of general harassment, disinformation, planting agents on staffs and other tactics designed to limit the effectiveness of the alternative papers, Mackenzie says.

One such later target was the Berkeley Barb, in its heyday one of the most influential voices of the New Left. The Barb fell victim to something called Project Resistance, another CIA operation that was founded with a narrow objective — to protect CIA recruiters on college campuses — but grew like Topsy.

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